

# CHINA'S 中国对外贸易 FOREIGN TRADE

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### Business Without Frontiers

— Exclusive Interview with Chunmei  
Maja Sun, Co-Founder and CEO of  
China Business Center Europe (CBCE)



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Dutch Pavilion at CIFTIS in 2016, by CBCE

# To **Establish** A High-end Business Platform and Boost **Economic & Trade** Development

— Exclusive Interview with Chunmei Maja Sun, Co-Founder and CEO of China Business Center Europe (CBCE)

By Ada Wong

**O**n a bright sunny spring day in Beijing, we interviewed Chunmei Sun, her more well-known name in the western world is Maja Sun (we will use Maja in the following text), co-founder and CEO of China Business Center Europe (CBCE).

Since the year of 2003, Maja co-initiated and co-organized the largest Chinese New Year celebration in the Netherlands which attracts thousands of people every year. Having been held for 16 consecutive

years, the celebration has become a traditional festival in The Hague in the Netherlands.

In the year of 2004, Maja Sun founded the Sun-Sun Group in the Netherlands to engage in import and export trade, which aimed to help small and medium-sized department stores and furniture companies import products from China.

In 2006, Maja started to organize a series of Sino-Dutch business conferences to build a bridge between the Chinese and Dutch enterprises

to directly communicate and to help enterprises from both sides establish effective partnerships.

In 2009, Maja's team and the World Eminence Chinese Business Association (evolved into Tojoy Sharing Holding Group) jointly organized The China-Netherlands Economic and Trade Summit in the Netherlands, a delegation consisting of 92 high-level Chinese entrepreneurs attended this high-end summit. This is the first time and the only occasion in the Dutch history to hold a large-scale

banquet at the Ridderzaal (knight hall) of the national council (equals to the Great Hall of the People in China).

Maja's business empire, however, does not stop here. As early as 2015, she founded China Business Center Netherlands (CBCN) to build a high-end business platform and to effectively boost Sino-European economic and trade cooperation. Since its foundation, CBCN has invited and accompanied over twenty former leaders of European nations to attend large-scale business activities in China, including former French prime minister François Fillon, former German vice Chancellor Joschka Fischer, and former Spanish prime minister José Luis Zapatero. CBCN assisted Chinese enterprises such as Beijing Tongrentang (China's famous medicine brand) to enter into the Dutch market and then into the European market. CBCN helped authoritative Chinese media like Xinhua News Agency and Jiemian.com conduct exclusive interviews with state leaders like former Belgian prime minister Yves Leterme and former Finnish prime minister Esko Ahö.

Today, we invite Maja Sun to share her success stories and hope to enlighten our audience who expect to succeed. Maybe at a certain moment in your life, it will create a miracle for you.

## CBCN helps Chinese companies enter into Europe

**China's Foreign Trade: Why did you invite former state leaders of European countries to China to visit Chinese companies?**

**Maja Sun:** This is driven by clients and the market. First, former state leaders possess high credibility both in their country and on the international stage, and their participation may have a positive impact on the companies and improve companies' images. Second, Chinese entrepreneurs can learn a lot from former state leaders' rich experience, deep and unique way of thinking and their international vision. Third, companies inviting former state leaders to attend activities normally have a big scale and most companies have entered into the international market or have initiated strategic engagement in the international market. During the communication with the leaders, entrepreneurs can learn the demands of the local market and up-to-date business opportunities, which enable them to prepare for entering into that market in the near future.

These former state leaders care much about their reputation and they do not easily accept an invitation. With interest in the Chinese market and the



Former Prime Minister of Spain José Luis Zapatero

huge change brought by the nearly 40-year economic development in China, and the principle of promoting further economic and trade cooperation between China and their own country, the former state leaders would like to gain more knowledge about representative Chinese enterprises and get in contact with the new innovative generation entrepreneurs in China. Therefore, I believe we are doing the right things at the right moment.

**China's Foreign Trade: You have established several companies like the Sun-Sun Group, why did you set up CBCN? What was your purpose?**

**Maja Sun:** Since 2004, more and more Chinese companies "go global" and regard Europe as an important investment destination. In this process, I have seen many companies invest in a non-effective or unsuccessful way due to various reasons. For instance, these companies did not invest within their capabilities, which president Xi described as "the pony pulls a heavy truck". Although the original intention was good, no effect was achieved, which leads to waste of resources and capital. Therefore, I wanted to establish a platform to share with Chinese companies about my experiences and lessons when I set up and run companies in the Netherlands and Europe in the past over ten years. Coincidentally,



Former President of Serbia Boris Tadic

the founders of Winkelman en Van Hessen BV, a large-scale public relation company also had a similar intention. The company organizes dozens of large-scale business activities and conferences every year and has accumulated lots of Dutch decision-makers' data, and they really hope to help Dutch companies enter into the Chinese market and make a difference. Therefore, we jointly set up CBCN to effectively boost China-Netherlands business development, which comes quite naturally.

### **CBCN rapidly expands its business scope**

**China's Foreign Trade: A few days ago, we noted that CBCN has changed its name as China Business Center Europe (CBCE), does this mean that your business have entered into other European nations?**

**Maja Sun:** Yes, with the development in the past three years, our business has expanded into more than 20 European nations, which is mainly driven by market demand. Inviting former state leaders from the European nations has also played a key role in our business expansion. These state leaders offer to introduce and recommend many top public relation and consulting companies to cooperate with us. Moreover, thanks to their powerful interpersonal network in the local government and the business domain, these former state leaders possess much information beyond our imagination. The most valuable thing is their trust and willingness to share their resources and they even directly introduce business to us. So far, CBCE has established close partnership in over 20 nations, like Austria, Spain, France, Portugal, Finland, Poland, and Serbia. Immodestly, from the perspective of government and entrepreneur resources in China and Europe, CBCE definitely comes out top in the domain of boosting China-Europe business cooperation.

**China's Foreign Trade: What is the driving force behind the fast development of CBCE?**

**Maja Sun:** Our fast expansion is closely related with China's rapid development in the past dozens of

years, which is the macro background. Certainly, the most important factor is our company creates a core value that clients require, which satisfies their core demand and can be put into implementation. First, CBCE boasts powerful direct resources of government functional departments and entrepreneurs both in China and Europe, which enables CBCE to have a direct dialogue with the top decision-makers and shorten decision-making time. Second, all the three founders of CBCE have rich practical experiences for setting up and running companies, our understanding of the business essence and powerful platform resources may help customers to identify and solve problems, this may effectively boost business cooperation. This kind of effectiveness not only reflects in effective resource and capital utilization, but also in decision-making, process, result and timeframe. Besides, as a bridge for China-Europe business cooperation, CBCE possesses indispensable expertise and experience to coordinate cultural differences in China-Europe business. Unlike many governmental or private business promotion agencies which mainly focused on "introducing in" companies, CBCE is unique in terms of providing one-stop services from introducing in, setting up and running smoothly.



### **"Introducing in, setting up and running smoothly"**

**China's Foreign Trade: The description "introducing in, setting up and running smoothly" is quite vivid, can you illustrate what services are included in your one-stop services?**

**Maja Sun:** I would like to take China's famous medicine brand Beijing Tongrentang as an example and explain how it enter into the Netherlands.

After Beijing Tongrentang has voiced their intention to enter into the Dutch market, we collaborated with the brand to conduct 7-month due diligence in the local market in terms of market demand, laws and regulations as well as finance and tax.

After due diligence, we managed the whole process including setting up a local branch, hiring financial, legal and tax experts, registering the company in the chamber of commerce and establishing a clear financial system. Considering Beijing Tongrentang's long-term planning in Europe and the local financial environment, we suggested Beijing Tongrentang to set up a holding company in the Netherlands and then to set up a Dutch branch under the holding company. As the Netherlands has favorable tax policies for companies, it is convenient to conduct financial control and supervision on other European branches of Beijing Tongrentang.

In the first two years after the company was founded, to ensure our national brand can be successfully settled into into the Netherlands, I held the post of managing director of Beijing Tongrentang's Dutch branch, and made the new positioning of Tongrentang's development strategy in the Dutch market based on the local market features. After the Dutch branch smoothly survived the hard times in the first two years, we found a more suitable director for the Dutch branch to support its development in the next stage. Against the backdrop of the company's sound development, our management team finished the handover to the new director and his

team, which lays favorable foundation for Beijing Tongrentang's next-step development in Europe.

**China's Foreign Trade: Apart from helping Chinese companies "go global", what have you done to help the European companies "introduce in China"?**

**Maja Sun:** No matter for "going global" or "introducing in", the most important thing is to have powerful government and company resources in the local market, which will help companies find suitable partners in the local market and establish a properly matched cooperation. We are a long-term strategic partner of Tojoy Sharing Holding Group, the largest entrepreneur platform in China, and we have cooperated for over 12 years. CBCE is also a supporting partner for China Beijing International Fair for Trade in Services (CIFTIS), which is jointly hosted by China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) and Beijing municipal government. All these large company platforms provide us with rich Chinese company resources, and a direct dialogue with Chinese companies' decision-makers. This is the basis and a necessary condition to effectively match Chinese companies with their European counterparts. Companies with project-based cooperation normally demand to establish mutual trust via one-to-one communication. Therefore, we "introduce" the European companies mainly in the form of organizing high-end customized business delegations to China. For example, In May 2016, we led over 10 Dutch companies to participate in the CIFTIS. After communicating with the CIFTIS organizing committee, less than two months was left to organize the delegation. By virtue of powerful resources in China and the Netherlands, we not only successfully set up the Dutch Pavilion, but also held business lectures during the fair to arrange one-to-one business matching for the exhibited Dutch companies. Eventually, this "introducing in" activity was successfully completed and the exhibited Dutch companies found



Former Prime Minister of Belgium Yves Leterme

suitable partners to conduct business in the Chinese market.

**China's Foreign Trade: Can you tell us what surprise CBCE will bring to us in the next phase?**

**Maja Sun:** As far as I can tell, our strategic partner Tojoy Sharing Holding Group will make big moves in Europe and as the group's chief representative in Europe, we will fully take charge of Tojoy's strategy in Europe.

I would like to briefly introduce Tojoy Sharing Holding Group. The group was founded in 1991 and is China's biggest enterprise accelerator. With "Accelerate Business Growth & Bring Happiness to Partners" as their mission, they have incubated over 30 high-growth enterprises in the past three years, like Zhixiang Sharing Bike, Hanbond Suit and Fkgou.com. Besides, Tojoy Sharing Holding Group has more than 100 wholly-owned and holding companies in 37 cities across China.

To be more specific, on one hand we focus on introducing in European companies, which are suitable to achieve large-scale business in China, by franchising to the Chinese market

via Tojoy, the biggest enterprise accelerator in China. on the other hand, we also bring the Tojoy Sharing Holding Group incubated projects that are suitable to be duplicated in Europe into the European market, such as Zhixiang Sharing Bike and Hanbond Suit.

Apart from assisting Tojoy to expand its business presence in Europe, next step CBCE will focus on helping China's high-tech companies enter into the European market. In the past few years, China has made remarkable achievements in terms of development and innovation of internet and artificial intelligence products. Upholding our faith, we hope to effectively integrate the top political and business resources of the European nations, to help Chinese companies successfully enter into Europe based on our strong implementation capability and combine the superiorities of the Chinese companies with the Dutch and European companies to create new products and services. This will realize win-win result and benefit the consumers.

We believe that helping clients and others succeed is CBCE's success. ☺